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KASHMIR REPORT

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President Clinton urges dialogue to resolve the Kashmir conflict

President Bill Clinton, in a joint press conference with India's Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, announced that he hoped "India and Pakistan would continue their constructive dialogue on ways to resolve their differences over Kashmir".

The Jammu and Kashmir All Parties Hurriyet (Freedom) Conference has supported the US President's call for negotiations. In a statement in New Delhi, the Conference expressed its willingness to enter into a "positive dialogue without preconditions" to resolve the Kashmir dispute peacefully, and reiterated that, as the central party to the dispute, the people of Kashmir are integral to achieving a just and lasting peace in Kashmir.

The Conference also called for constructive steps to reduce tensions in the Valley particularly,

i) make an immediate and total cessation of military action and stop the killing of Kashmir people by Indian armed forces;

ii) withdraw all military and para-military presence from Kashmir;

iii) release unconditionally all prisoners detained under black laws, in particular, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Shabir Shah. and Abdul Gani Lone; and,

iv) provide facilities to the Kashmiri leadership from both sides of the cease-fire line to confer and evolve a methodology for the implementation of UN resolutions.

President Clinton's call for a negotiated sentiment of the Kashmir conflict has been widely welcome by Kashmiris and their supporters abroad. Said World Kashmir Freedom Movement President, Dr Ayyub Thukar, in London that Kashmiri people are grateful for the US President and his Administration's continued concern for an early and peaceful settlement of the Kashmir conflict.

Washington, DC based Kashmiri-American Council Executive Director, Dr G.N. Fai said: "We are grateful to President Clinton for reiterating to Prime Minister Rao the need for a dialogue to resolve the dispute. His recognition of this fact is a positive indication of the beginning of a process to end the killings and human rights abuses in Indian occupied Kashmir".

Said Congressman Dan Burton (Republican) addressing a huge rally of Kashmiris and their supporters outside the White House, where Indian Prime Minister Rao was meeting with President Clinton, "Kashmir was the largest military concentration anywhere in the world against an unarmed civilian population". Promising to fight for Kashmiri freedom, Dan Burton said, "Kashmiri people should get a chance to have a free vote organised impartially by the United Nations".

Prior to Narasimha Rao's visit to United States, US House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman, Congressman Lee Hamilton (Democrat) told the Asia Society in Washington DC that "the single, most contentious issue disrupting Indo-American relations is the question of Kashmir. The Kashmir issue has to be resolved before economic forces can reshape the bilateral relationship".

He also said, "the 1972 Simla accord between India and Pakistan can and should be the basis for ending this conflict, but any negotiated settlement must take into account the wishes of the Kashmiri people". Congressman Hamilton warned New Delhi that "until and unless the Indian government is prepared to meet the legitimate political and economic grievances of the Kashmiri, the rebellion will continue".

Indian army is as undisciplined as the paramilitary BSF and CRPF

The Indian army in occupied Kashmir is not more disciplined than the paramilitary forces like the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). This is the verdict of the People's Union of Civil Liberty, a leading non-governmental watch-dog against infringement of civil liberties and violation of human rights in India.

The PUCL, reporting on the killings on March 19 this year in Mahind village near the State capital, said that after an earlier mine-blast two kilometres away from the village, the Rashtriya Rifles (RR) of the Indian army blasted three houses as a result of which seven persons were burnt alive.

PUCL report said, more than half of the village population of 2,500 has left Mahind for surrounding villages in Seri-Gufwara, Srihama, Satkipora and Kheren for fear of further retaliation from the RR.

The Srinagar branch of the PUCL, whose three-member team visited Mahind, 12 kilometres from Bijbehara, gathered the testimony from eye-witnesses. PUCL in its May bulletin reported that a mine blast had taken place just after noon on 18 March, two km away from the village in which an army vehicle was damaged and two army personnel were injured.

"Following the blast, the RR personnel stopped a private bus which happened to be coming from Srihama. The passengers were beaten to a pulp. They were threatened with dire consequences for the blast, which the army personnel believed, was the handiwork of some militants from Mahind.

"On the same night the RR personnel cordoned off Mahind and blasted 3 houses. Two houses got damaged and but in the third house, the blast caused fire as a result of which 5 inmates were burnt alive and 2 sustained 95% burn injuries and later died. Three horses in the nearby stable were burnt alive as well. The army personnel left the spot shortly after.

"The dead included: Miss Rathi, 38 w/o of Mohammad Abdullah Sheikh; Javaid Ahmed Sheikh, 9; Miss Jamila, 12; Ms Azi, 65; Abdul Salam, 25; Miss Shaista Gulzar; and Miss Shabnam Gulzar. One, Abdul Rahman, head master of the Government Middle School in Seri-Gufwara, a relative of the deceased family, was critically injured in the rescue work and is in SHMB hospital, Srinagar.

"Of the houses damaged by the Indian army's blast fire, one belonged to Gh. Qadir Wani, son-in-law of Abdul Gaffar Naikoo (all the 7 people burnt alive belonged to this family); the other two belonged to Gh. Hassan Wagey and Abdul Gaffar Wagey Bhat respectively. Among the people which the PUCL team met were Gh. Qadir Wani, 60, son-in-law of Abdul Gaffar Naikoo; Abdul Rashid Wani, 25; and, Hari Krishan, 19, s/o Thakur Das. besides many eye-witnesses."

Thakur Das's family is the only Hindu family out of 53 left in Mahind village. 52 Hindu families have migrated to Jammu and other places, some out of fear, some for better job opportunities", PUCL report said. According to the report, eye-witness accounts confirmed the Rashtriya Rifles' totally undisciplined action in killing innocent villagers so brutally.

PUCL report said, "the official version about the incident is deplorable. ... What is also deplorable is that none from the army nor any responsible state functionary has visited the village to explore the truth and take appropriate measures. It appears that the seven human beings burnt alive by army's arson attack were 'non-persons', and the episode a 'non-event' in the eyes of the authorities".

India's women rights group calls for withdrawal of Indian army from Kashmir

Women's Initiative, a civil and human rights group of Indian women, have called for total withdrawal of Indian army and paramilitary forces from cities, towns, villages and populated areas of Indian occupied Kashmir and for the release of all political prisoners.

"We believe that the Kashmiri people must decide their own future", said the group's members at a press conference in Srinagar May 12.

A four-member team of the group including, Delhi's Ms Gauri Choudhary and Ms Shobha Chhachi, and Bombay's Ms Manimala and Ms Ritu Dewan visited the Indian occupied Kashmir recently.

They toured a number of villages and places which had witnessed death and destruction during the past five years in Baramulla, Kupwara, Pulwama, Anantnag, Badgam and Srinagar districts.

They also visited various hospitals and educational institutions and religious centres in Srinagar and met representatives of women's organisations, human rights groups, lawyers and students bodies, trade unions and other individuals and organisations in the Valley.

Indian women activists said, they met opposed all kinds of violence and demanded lifting of bunkers erected by the occupation forces around the Hazratbal shrine and handing the holiest shrine in Kashmir over to its management, the Muslim Auqaf Trust.

US Congressmen petition Clinton for just and lasting solution of Kashmir problem

Washington, D.C. - Twenty-three US Congressmen have, in a joint memorandum, urged President Clinton to strongly impress on the visiting Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to "undertake a comprehensive strategy with all affected parties in the region to achieve a just and lasting settlement in Kashmir".

They also asked the US President to press Rao, whom he was to meet May 19, to "take concrete and meaningful steps towards improving the human rights situation and promoting a climate of religious and political tolerance;

- impose civil and criminal sanctions against all of those responsible for human rights violations, and publish a full listing of security force personnel responsible for such actions;
- allow human rights groups, such Amnesty International and Asia Watch, as well as international media, full access throughout Kashmir; and,
- ensure unrestricted access to the International Committee of the Red Cross to prisons, other places of detention, and the delivery of humanitarian relief and medical assistance".

Congressmen said that the people of Kashmir have suffered for too long. The people of India and Pakistan have stood too close to the brink of war for too long. It should be clear to all parties that the use of force and repression will not lead to peace in Kashmir.

They said, "it is clearly in American interests to help ease the tensions in the region and to work towards achieving a negotiated settlement that addresses the legitimate political aspirations and economic grievances of the Kashmiri people"

They said that the House of Representatives has repeatedly voiced its concerns over the matter and, had voted last year to prohibit all US international military education and training funds to India until that government took steps to improve the human rights situation.

"We believe", Congressmen said in their memorandum, "the time is now ripe to end hostilities in Kashmir and begin a real dialogue for peace, self-determination, justice and respect for human rights".

Congressmen signing the joint memorandum were: Alan Wheat, David Dreier, Bill Paxon, Vic Fazio, Dan Burton, Neil Abercrombie, Wally Herger, George Miller, Dana Rohrabacher, William Jefferson, Philip Crane, Gary Condit, Ken Calvert, Julian Dixon, Constance Morella, Gerald Solomon, Peter King, Edolphus Towns, James Moran, Peter Barca, Thomas C. Sawyer, Charles Wilson and Marcy Kaptur.

Massive Kashmiri-American rally urges US President to press India for fundamental rights

Washington, D.C. - Thousands of Kashmiri Americans and human rights activists, holding a rally in front of the White House, called on President Clinton to press the Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to restore fundamental rights in Indian-occupied Kashmir. The Kashmiri rally was timed for Rao's meeting with President Clinton May 19, 1994.

Participants in the rally carried placards and balloons that read, 'Kashmir: Let the People Decide', 'India out of Kashmir', 'Freedom for All, Freedom for Kashmir'. Later protesters marched from the White House to the Capitol Hill to remind the US Congress about India's terrorism in Kashmir, and the resulting danger posed to world peace.

Addressing the rally Congressman Dan Burton

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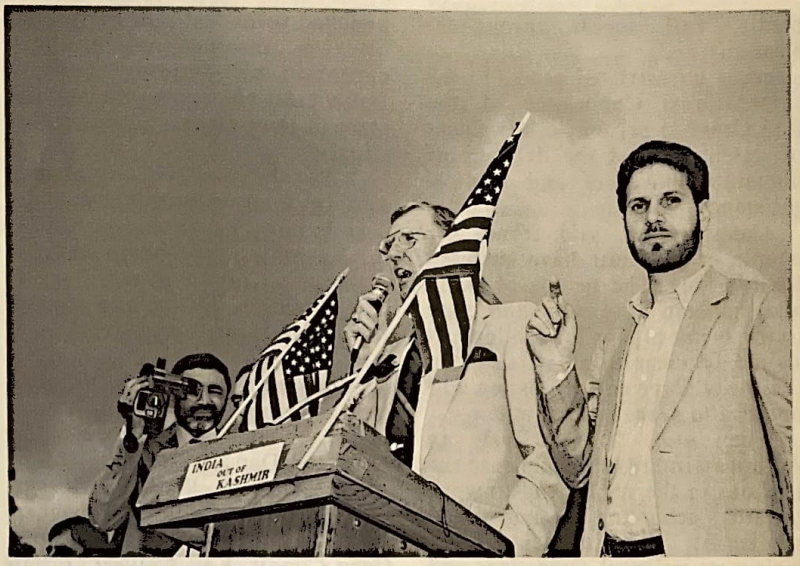
Huge Kashmiri rally outside the White House during Rao's meeting with President Clinton

Kashmiri-American rally opposite White House & Capitol Hill



Congressman Dan Burton (second from right) addressing the Kashmiri rally in front of the White House

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(Republican) said that Prime Minister Rao had failed to tell President Clinton that the Indian occupation forces in Kashmir have killed more than 32,000 Kashmiris since 1990, gang-raped thousands of Kashmiri women, and tortured and maimed countless young men.

He promised to fight for Kashmiri freedom till victory. He said that Kashmir is the largest military concentration anywhere in the world against an unarmed civilian population. Congressman further said that Kashmiri people should get a chance to have a free vote organised impartially by the United Nations.

American journalist Martin Sugarman, giving an account of his recent visit to Indian occupied Kashmir, said that he had witnessed the occupation and the sufferings of the Kashmiri people with his own eyes. The people, he said, were sacrificing their lives and everything they have only to secure their right to justice and democracy. Sugarman said, the Kashmiri people, who want nothing more than their right to be a part of decision-making process, deserve all the help possible.

Congressional Human Rights Foundation's Saean Hamilton said that if India was the world's largest democracy then why does it not allow the Kashmiri people to decide their own future. He said that Kashmir is recognised as a disputed territory by the UN which means that it is not a part of India. Hamilton reminded the US policy makers that the USA is a signatory to successive UN resolutions which call for a plebiscite in occupied Kashmir.

Addressing the rally KAC's Executive Director, Dr. G.N. Fai said that Kashmiri people are aware that the government of India can only chain them, imprison the leaders of the All Parties Hurriyet Conference (APHC), torture them, kill them but India cannot stifle their demand for freedom and their will to sacrifice and secure victory.

Dr. Mehrajud Din, former professor of medicine from Srinagar Medical College in Kashmir said that America has not only a global responsibility but a moral obligation as well to resolve the Kashmir issue. He said that the freedom movement in Kashmir is a popular grassroots movement. Dr Mehraj said that Narasimha Rao should get the message that there can be no peace in South Asia without resolving the Kashmir conflict.

Mr Ghulam Nabi Hagroo, Chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Human Rights Commission gave a detailed account of Indian atrocities in

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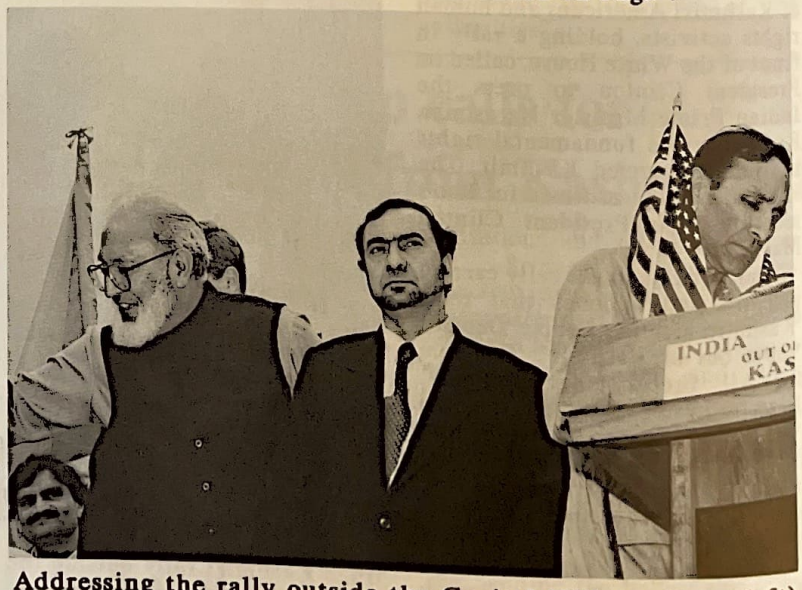


Addressing the rally outside the Capitol Hill are (from left) G. N. Hagroo, Dr G. N. Fai and Dr M. A. Sahaf

'People's goal is self-determination' - JKLF President Yaseen Malik

"Our goal is the right of self determination. Pakistan may be supporting some people; but so is India - it may be Ghulam Rasool Kar or Farooq Abdullah", said Mr Yaseen Malik, President of the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front, in a recent interview from inside a special jail in New Delhi.

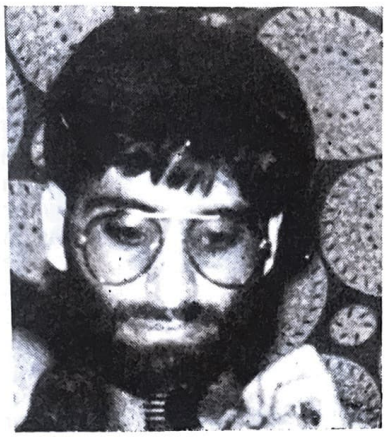
Twenty-eight year old Yaseen Malik, detained by the Indian government without trial for the past four years and in poor health after open-heart surgery during internment, was replying to the interviewer's query that parallel to the JKLF struggle is a struggle for accession to Pakistan, and that Pakistan is funding it.

"Our movement is not affected by the struggle for accession with Pakistan. On the contrary, Pakistan has given us the advantage of international attention by raising the Kashmiri issue at all international fora", he told Delhi's Week newspaper late February this year, in reply to the question whether the pro-Pakistan lobby has got the better of the liberation movement.

"The internationalisation of Kashmir has provided an opportunity to solve the problem mutually, for both the countries (Indian and Pakistan) are getting persuasive feelers on Kashmir. If this opportunity is not availed of now, tomorrow a direct intervention could be possible. If that direct intervention, not by forces but by diplomatic pressure, takes place, India and Pakistan will not be players, they will become spectators."

Mr Malik, (who has since been released May 16 from Indian internment) said, "we are three parties today (Kashmir, India and Pakistan), each of which feels that if one gave up, it is humiliation. The three of us have got to sit and find a solution that is practical and satisfactory to all, so that none feels that it has lost something or got something or was let down. That is the accommodation I am talking about".

Asked how long the Kashmiri people will sustain the movement,



JKLF President Yaseen Malik addressing newsmen after release

Mr Malik replied: "People will be able to sustain it for 40 years or may be even 50 years. But the Indian forces are trying to harass and exhaust them. We have got to face these things. After all we are fighting for freedom from this (Indian) government which will do anything to kill the movement".

Questioned whether all members of the All Parties Hurriyet Conference are progressive in their outlook, Mr Malik said: "India has a secular image. But you have the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ruling four states. In Maharashtra, Bal Thackery says that the Muslims are like cancer on a body. But do we look at that as the viewpoint of India? There will be different schools of thought in every society. But the majority view will prevail." And, if the majority view is in favour of India: "We will accept it wholeheartedly, because I too have only one vote".

Asked whether he has considered Indian government's appeal for talks, JKLF President said: "On what basis? They (Indian government) lay down preconditions that the talks should be 'within the Indian constitutional framework'. That would mean accepting that there is no problem in Kashmir, that it is just another Centre-State issue. They are willing to talk to Pakistan, but laying preconditions for those people whose right it is to be a party".

Has he ever thought of talking, just once, to see if it can be followed up as people are dying? Mr Malik's replied: "It is not a question of talking once and seeing. There is a precondition and there is no ground for us to talk. If a person decides that it is a Centre-State issue and a law and order problem, there is nothing to talk about".

"The Indian government cannot take a decision on Kashmir because there is no charismatic leader like Jawaharlal Nehru or Jayaprakash Narayan. The opposition and the ruling parties are at loggerheads and there is no consensus on national issue".

Queried what will happen to the political process being contemplated by India, Mr Malik said: "There will be Punjab-type of elections. Punjab had it (election) recently, but we have been having them from 1947, with backdoor entrants all the time. Punjab-type of elections will only bring about destruction in Kashmir".

Asked who will act as a catalyst, the JKLF President said: "It is a problem of the people, not of a political party or a politician. The government of India is not sincere. I am not a representative of the people. No individual matters. Government of India should invite Kashmir as a 'qaum' (nation).

"Kashmiris will decide whom they will send. No one matters, whether it is Syed Ali Shah Geelani or Shabir Shah or Umar Farooq or Yaseen Malik. When the Indian Home Minister talks of an open invitation, why is he laying a precondition? And what is an open invitation? Nobody will come up and say I represent the people of Kashmir. I can say I represent the JKLF, but it's wrong to say that JKLF represents the people.

"The other thing in any negotiation is balance of power. All the conflicting parties should

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Yaseen Malik's interview

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treat each other as equals. Now, you hold talks and in the evening, the government issues a statement that there will be no compromise on India's integrity ... so-called integrity. That's provoking the other person to issue a similar statement. It shows that there is distrust".

Questioned what then is the right step, the JKLF President said: "First it is necessary to create an atmosphere conducive to honest interaction. In Kashmir there are intellectuals, a bar association, doctors' groups, trade unions, teachers' associations etc. Here (in India) too there are intellectuals, unofficial people, the national political parties and so on. These groups together can have seminars to evolve a consensus. The suspicions will be removed. Such seminars should also be held on the other side of the border".

Mr Malik was asked, who would organise the seminars. He replied, "the JKLF will take the initiative. People, not necessarily the politicians, will be the participants, because no son of a politician has died but many intellectuals have. If in such seminars, what the Kashmiris are saying frankly can be proved wrong by history or logic, prove it, because talking in the air is no good and the atmosphere will only get vitiated. More people will die. Even the Indian forces are dying, they are not the sons of Narasimha Rao or Chavan."

Queried what he would do after such seminars, the JKLF President pointed out, "after that, talks with the government will be possible without any preconditions and with equal status. Even the Indian Prime Minister and the Home Minister are saying that there is hundred per cent mutual mistrust, and there is nobody they can talk to. That is an escape route. If they invite the Kashmiri 'qaum' (nation) and if it fails to send representatives, the Indian government can demonstrate its sincerity. Who is the Indian government to pick out of Congress, National Conference, JKLF, Yaseen Malik or Shabir Shah?"

To the question whether this would mean that at some stage the Indian government can talk to the people of Kashmir, Mr Malik said, "but there is a third party, Pakistan". When the interviewer pointed out that they (Indian government) would talk to Pakistan under the Simla Agreement, Mr Malik was quick to retort: "We have rejected the Simla Agreement because Kashmiris are not a party to it."

Sikhs renew struggle for independent homeland

A new Sikh political party, the Shrimoni Akali Dal, whose formation was announced at the Golden Temple in Amristar May 1, has demanded an independent sovereign state for Sikhs. The new party has been set up under the direction of the Akal Takht.

Belying India's claim to have successfully suppressed the movement for a sovereign Sikh state, the new political union of various Sikh parties is a reminder that the Sikh spirit of freedom remains alive and strong after 15 years of brutal killings of the Sikh people by Indian armed and security forces.

Announcing the formation of the Shrimoni Akali Dal, Surjit Singh Barnala, former chief minister of Punjab said the affairs of the party would be run by a six-member committee. The SKD has been formed with the merger of various Dal factions such as the Akali Dal (Panthic), Kabul Dal, Mann Dal, Babar Akali Dal, Manjit faction and the Talwandi Dal.

The Shrimoni Akali Dal's historic Amritsar Declaration of May 1, 1994, demanding Sikh independence, said in the Sikh homeland the community would be free to profess and propagate Sikhism without interference from any quarter.

It said, this was nothing new, but reiterates the demand for fulfilment of the promises made to the Sikh community by the Indian government at the time of British withdrawal from India leading to India and Pakistan partition.

The declaration said, "the Indian leaders had promised to the then Akali leaders an independent Sikh state, but this was never given and the Sikh community was betrayed. If the Indian government does not concede the demand, the Akali Dal (Amristar) would launch a struggle for its acceptance".

Kashmiris want India out of Kashmir

The militants are determined to continue their struggle against what they view as the tyranny of the Indian government. Azadi (freedom) is on the lips of the shop owners, taxi drivers and houseboat owners, said Victoria Schofield in the Financial Times of 14 May, adding that the Indian army is equally determined to crush the militants.

Ms Schofield, who recently returned from a visit to Indian occupied Kashmir, said: "The town of Srinagar has little attraction for the tourist, and the consequences of the insurgency are all too evident. The military is everywhere. There are bunkers at each cross-roads and straddling every bridge.

"The streets are filled with gun-totting border security forces

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Rao delivers an unpardonable insult to the Americans

'Outrage in Boston', screamed the New York Times's two-column report when Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's security team demanded he was not to be served by the black employees of Boston's Four Seasons hotel, where Rao and an entourage of 50 aides were staying May 16 for his engagement at Harvard.

In a circular to the staff, the Four Seasons management said, any task done for the Prime Minister of India must be done by white employees. The demand was so outrageous, said one veteran black employee, "I didn't know whether to cry or quit".

"The offence was so blatant and egregious that the head of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination Michael T. Duffy, who could not at first believe it", the NYT said, "has ordered an investigation".

The Four Seasons management has since apologised and paid compensation to affected employees. Said the NYT report: "What has happened at the Four Seasons was a moral outrage. The Commission's investigation was continuing. Additionally, the United States Government has an interest in knowing whether a foreign head of government has been fostering racial discrimination here".

Commenting on the incident, the Boston's Overseas Friends of India, in a pamphlet captioned 'Racist Rao insults America' said: "While most Americans were horrified by the Indian PM's racist demand, to the Indian minorities Rao's demand was no strange whim of a foreign fanatic".

It listed India's racist outrage against millions of so-called 'Untouchables' and the continuing pogroms against the 150 million Muslim minority of India. In the latest anti-Muslim outrage following the Babri mosque destruction by Hindu fundamentalits, 5,000 Muslims were slaughtered by Shiv Sena, a Hindu extremist organisation.

It also detailed Rao's actions during his tenure as minister and chief minister in Andra Pradesh (AP) provincial government, which, it said, "were reportedly racially motivated and terrorist, such as, the blowing up of Nizam State Railways in the 1940s; chanting anti-Muslim slogans as a student of Hyderabad University from where he was expelled.

Rao, the pamphlet said, opposed the second language official status for Urdu when minister in AP in 1966; ordered the demolition of Qutb Shahi mosque in Hyderabad AP when he was chief minister - where Birla temple now stands - and his government lifted the ban on the RSS.

The Overseas Friends of India called on the American people to request the US State Department to seek an unconditional apology from India; declare Indian diplomats responsible for racist outrage personae non grata; demand India to put an end to the pogroms against the minorities and negotiate a permanent settlement of the Kashmir conflict respecting the rights of the Kashmiri people.

Kashmiris want India out

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and local police. Without warning, streets can be cordoned off because of a 'crackdown' - common parlance for search by the military for weapons."

Victoria Schofield added, "there are countless stories of young men being apprehended by the military, tortured and killed. One of the former Maharaja's guest houses has been taken over by the Border Security Force and is known to be one of the interrogation centres. Suspected militants are taken for what an intelligence officer called a 'few slaps' to make them reveal where they have hidden their weapons."

Kashmir Rally in Washington

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occupied Kashmir. He said that he has documented hundreds of cases of 'disappearances' and torture. Hagroo said that the Indian occupation troops are using the cover of 'crackdown' to rape Kashmiri women and loot their jewellery. He said that the Indian occupation has turned Kashmir into a living hell but the people are determined to fight till victory.

The day-long Washington rally was organised by the Washington-based Kashmiri-American Council (KAC), in cooperation with several Kashmiri organisations from Azad Kashmir, namely the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front, Muslim Conference, JK Liberation League, Jammat-e-Islami and Kashmir Federation of USA. The rally brought together Kashmiris belonging to all shades of political opinion from across the United States.

The KAC published a full-page advertisement in the Washington Post on May 19 to remind President Clinton and the American policy makers of India's persistent refusal to let the people of Kashmir exercise their right of self-determination and decide their own future, and of India's terrorist activities in the occupied land. KAC asked that India should be asked to abide by the law.

The KAC also sponsored rallies in Houston on 16 May and at Harvard University in Boston the next day, both places being on the itinerary of Narasimha Rao. The local television stations and the Boston Globe published reports of the Kashmiri rallies.

British hostages released

British hostages, Kim Housego and David Mackei were released Thursday, 23 June, 1994 by the militant group holding them at 3.30 PM local time in Anantnag (Islamabad) into the hands of journalists.

Journalists later took them to Srinagar, a distance of 80 km from Anantnag, where both the Britons were handed over to Mrs Mackei at about 5 PM. David Housego wasn't there at the time. British hostages were kidnapped by the militants June 6 in Aru near Pahalgam.

World Kashmir Freedom Movement President, Dr Ayyub Thukar who had strongly appealed for their release (see below), has welcomed the freeing of British hostages by the Kashmiri freedom fighters.

Militants told journalists that they had taken the two Britons in their custody, first because they had entered their territory, and secondly they had suspected them to be spies. When they were convinced the Britons were not spies, militants assured them they would release them in circumstances in which their safety could be fully guaranteed.

Militants said their fight is with India and they didn't want to any harm to come to any one else on their account. Since they realised the two Britons were really on a trekking trip, they immediately started making arrangement of which they could be absolutely sure about their safe release.

Talking to journalists, British hostages, who appeared to be in good health, said the militants had throughout treated them well and had fed them well on a menu consisting mostly of cooked rice and mutton curry.

Kashmiri political leaders respresented in the Jammu & Kashmir All Party Hurriyet Conference had made repeated appeals severally and jointly for the hostages' release. So had Kashmiri leaders working for the Kashmiri cause abroad.

WKFM appeal for hostages release

The World Kashmir Freedom Movement and its associate organisations around the world were deeply concerned at the kidnapping of Kim Housego and David Mackie in Indian occupied Kashmir and have made an urgent appeal for their immediate release. WKFM President, Dr Ayyub Thukar had maintained hot-line contact with Kashmiri leadership of Indian occupied Kashmir throughout the crisis.

Dr Thukar in his statement of 8th June said: "We are in touch with the political leadership of the All Party Hurriyet (Freedom) Conference inside Kashmir to ensure the safety of the two Britons and for their immediate release".

"We are also trying to utilise the good offices of human rights organisations and, particularly, of persons like Lord Avebury, chairman of the British Parliamentary Human Rights Group and Justice V.M. Tarkunde of India, for both of whom Kashmiris have great respect".

The kidnapping, which took place at Aru in the mountainous region Pahalgam, 102 km south-east of Srinagar, was an act of retaliation against the Indian propaganda that Kashmir is normal and that the Indian army is in full control of the situation, according to Harkat-ul-Ansar (HA), the militant group which is reportedly involved.

The group, in a press statement much before the kidnapping, had said that it had already warned all tourists not to visit Indian occupied Kashmir, and that those who are already in Kashmir should leave the territory within 10 days.

The responsibility for the kidnapping lies with the Indian authorities who had given a false sense of security and safety. Actually, they do not have full control over even a village in Kashmir, HA said.

The Indian occupation forces, with their 'search and hunt operation' all around Pahalgam, would only complicate the situation and endanger the life and safety of the hostages, WKFM statement said, and added that they (Indians) would by their ruthless acts of barbarity against the civilian population would be, unnecessarily, provoking the militants.

It said, "Kashmiris are engaged in a life and death struggle for the liberation of their homeland and for their right of self-determination. In their struggle they have lost 40,000 Kashmiri men, women and children. Untold sufferings have also been inflicted on them by the Indian occupation forces".

In his statement of 15 June, Dr Ayyub Thukar said that the hurdles the Indian administration is creating in early and safe release of the hostages, are causing gloom among the relatives of the hostages and in their countrymen.

"Yet the delay itself is not bringing any good name to the Kashmiri cause. More the delay, more the opportunity for India to bring the Kashmiri struggle into disrepute in the world's eye.

"For a people who are under siege, particularly for the last four years, and who have suffered so long under Indian occupation, it does not seem appropriate to keep others under any form of restraint.

"The Kashmiri organisations working for the Kashmiri cause abroad reiterate the appeal for the early release of the two Britons. If it turns out that the Indian administration is still putting hurdles, then the good offices of the UN Observers Group in Indian occupied Kashmir should be utilised".

It may be recalled that with this in mind, the British Foreign Office and the British High Commissioner in New Delhi had been putting pressure on India to withdraw its troops from the region around Pahalgam and urging the Indian government to facilitate an early and safe release of the British hostages.

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Kashmir Center The Voice of Kashmiri Women Center